

HELL'S LEGACY

By Harry B. Kennon in Reedy's Mirror

"GO TO HELL and get your money."

Wonder if any of the boys that used to work with me at Todd's, wholesale, will read this? . . . there were more than five hundred of us. If he does, he'll remember the poor joke that used to float about every payday. 'Bout as poor as the pay. And say! Maybe he'll remember old fade-away, Hell. Maybe. I don't know.

As I was saying, there were more than five hundred of us. We spent every day from eight to six under the roof of Todd's big store. No half thousand men could be more intimate, so far as Todd's business was concerned. That's what we were hired for. Beyond that we knew about as much of one another's outside doings as we did about old Hell's. Nobody could imagine him having any. We foregathered from all parts of the city at eight, slaved till six, with a noon hour for feed; quit, and went back to our holes. Sometimes we worked at night. Great life!

We were Jews, Gentiles and foreigners of all sorts, skimmings of the melting-pot. Dull set. And then there was Hell. If any human being could have been less interesting than old Hell, standing, year in and year out, behind the brass bars of the cashier's window, I ain't met him yet. How many years he had been there, I've no notion. He'd grown gray in Todd's service and nothing was left of him but a kind of a wooden dimness. Nobody doing business with him would have remembered him, without they came back to the cashier's desk and found him not there. That kind of a guy. Always there. We were all that kind—to hold our jobs.

We were humans, however, as I supposed Hell was human. Didn't know. Didn't think about it. And we were most of us young. Nobody could picture Hell young. He was born old; born behind his brass bars. As I was saying, most of us were young. Being humans, little bunches of fellows drew together for games outside Todd's game. Pocket-pool and billiards and bowling . . . drink or so on the side, sometimes . . . sometimes a girl. Innocent little games like that. Human games that might have lost us our jobs, if Todd's manager got on. Sometimes they did lose us our jobs. Say! that guy wasn't human. Well, I belonged to such a bunch. On the first and fifteenth of the month when the ghost walked—only times we saw Hell or found him interesting—we'd meet before his cage and guy one another while waiting for our turn to get our little spondulix. Hell never noticed. Just paid us off. That's all there was to it.

Just five words that shadow of a man got out of himself to me in the five years I'd known him. I had managed to pry a bit of a raise out of Todd's manager. To me that meant

victory; to Hell nothing. He opened his head, though, and said, as if it hurt him: "Get the good of it."

I noticed his eyes. Doubt if I ever credited the man with having eyes before. He had kind eyes. Glad I noticed them.

And then, one day, Hell died.

First I knew of his getting out of his cage was a petition passed round to buy flowers for the man's funeral. We always did that at Todd's. Reckon they do yet. Nobody ever thought of raising a fund when a poor devil got canned and needed it. Not on your life. Say! Salaries at Todd's wouldn't stand such extravagance. Funeral flowers didn't. But we generally coughed up for the posies, even if we had to borrow from one another to do it. Didn't make much difference whether one of the force died or got canned, though. That was the end of him. We forgot him. No, we weren't unfeeling. Just busy. Todd's didn't leave time for feeling.

Hell's finish was his beginning with me, however. Not that I wouldn't have forgot him. I would. Say! I was on the way to forgetting while digging for my flower money. But say! What you reckon? Right on top of the petition comes a note from an undertaker saying Hell had selected me as one of his pallbearers. Just like that. Thing a fellow can't pass up.

Funny stunt! The old two-for-a-nickel had selected his other five bearers out of my bunch—about the pick, for sport. And that got us all guessing. One thing just like Hell, though—to choose a Saturday half-holiday for his planting. Todd's wouldn't be deprived of our valuable services. Say! He sure was one conscientious old duffer, Hell was. Wouldn't have interfered with Todd's for a farm.

So, instead of going to the ball game that fine Saturday afternoon, we jumped a Blue Island avenue car and trolleyed clear down to never, to that undertaker's. Nobody showed up at the stiff shop but our bunch of six, the undertaker, and a little, fat, Irish priest. Hell, of course, was among those present. Nobody else. Ab-so-lutely. The undertaker insisted upon our taking a last look at the deceased. We didn't want to. But we did. He wasn't much to look at. Never had been. I missed the brass bars I had always seen him through.

It wasn't much of a funeral, for sure. No weepers nor clean wipes nor automobiles. Just a hearse and two hacks. But say! Our flowers loomed up grand—a punctured wheel with one spoke out, a pillar with a pigeon on it a cushion that said, "Rest"—funny thing to come from Todd's—and some loose stuff, awkward to handle. Well, when we were all set, the priest pulled out a little book and he and the undertaker had a conversation we none of us understood. When they got through we pallbearers put Hell and the flow-

ers into the ambulance and hit for the hacks. Four of the boys piled into one; the priest, the undertaker and the other two of us into the other. We pallbearers tried to act proper and solemn, riding with a priest and an undertaker, like we was the whole funeral, for sure. But say! They didn't seem to mind what was doing. Reckon it was just like my filling an easy order at Todd's, to them.

We rode nigh out to the edge of the country before we struck the cemetery. Pretty place for a picnic when we got there. All grass and trees and little hills—and a little river running through with a laugh. Peacefullest spot there, where we planted Hell—birds singing, and all that. On a slope to the river. Had to drive a stick in the ground to brace that pillar with the pigeon on top. Blame thing wouldn't stand up. Priest and undertaker had another short chat in that lingo I couldn't get the hang of. Say! It don't take long to play the finals, does it? Well, the grave diggers got busy filling up the hole; we peeled off our creepy black gloves and threw them in for good measure—and then it was nothing to do till tomorrow.

The little fat priest skinned out of his white jumper with lace round the tail, folded it up like 'twas precious, stowed it in a little black bag the undertaker had—and then handed each of us a good cigar, even the grave diggers. Says I to myself: What's the answer?"

You're guessing we was good and thirsty on top that long, dusty drive in the hot sun, and you got no more guesses coming. We was dry as dry—nigh onto supper time, too. I'd spotted a roadhouse just outside the cemetery gate. Reckon we all had. Reckon we thought more about stein and sandwiches, just then, than most anything. Know I did. So did the priest. He halted the procession when it reached the relief station.

"You're all to come back in the rear," says the priest, as we lined up to the bar spontaneous.

"Back in the rear" proved as slick a little beer-garden as ever you saw. Some swell must have made dates for a spread under the grape arbor—long table standing there all set out for fair.

"You're to sit down," says the priest, "after I've blessed it."

Then he got off a bit more of that strange stuff he had under his tongue, gave us the word in United States, and we all sat down full of wonder. 'Before we begin,' he says, like the good scout he was, "I must read you Mr. Hell's letter." And here's what he handed us:

"Dear Boys: I used to watch you having a good time at Todd's in spite of the grind there. It made me think of the days when I was your age, when Todd's wasn't as big as it now, and when men were something better than

machines. I used to envy you when I saw you waiting for one another outside the store door after six o'clock, and I used to wonder what little spree you had on for the night; used sometimes to picture what you were doing, and wish I could join in. But I couldn't, you know. You wouldn't have wanted me. . . . Father Murphy will tell you that I quit the job free of debt after jaying for my lot in the burying-ground and prayers to get me out of purgatory, which can't be worse for me than Todd's was. He will tell you, too, that I ordered and paid for this supper out of what was left. I should like to have asked all Todd's boys, but for cash; and then, you know, it only needed six of you to carry me home where all my friends are. Don't be bashful about piling in—there's plenty. Fill up. Get the good of it. I am with you. Frank Hell."

And say! Just think of it! I never knew before the generous old ghost had a front to his name. Wish I'd known and called his "Frank," just once. Well, well, well! But say! We got the good of that feed, and good it was. Best ever. Fried chicken and more fixin's than you can think of. Hell sure did know how to order. And drinks! Anything we wanted and all we wanted. The hackdrivers rose to the occasion when they sat down, after Father Murphy told them they were in it. The undertaker loosened up and got gay. And that little, fat devil of a priest! Well, say now! You can bet your sweet life he never told the stories he told us in church. And maybe we didn't drink old Hell a good journey back to his friends. Maybe we didn't. We floated him back.

And I got back to my hall bed-room sometime after midnight somehow, chuck full of contrition, gratitude, wonder and Hell's legacy. Say! Can you beat it?

A GLORIOUS OPPORTUNITY

Two young Irishmen in a Canadian regiment were going into the trenches for the first time, and their captain promised them five shilling each for every German they killed.

Pat lay down to rest while Mike performed the duty of watching. Pat had not lain long when he was awakened by Mike shouting:

"They're comin'! There're comin'!

"Who's comin'?" shouted Pat.

"The Germans," replied Mike.

"How many are there?"

"About 50,000."

"Begorra," shouts Pat, jumping up and grabbing his rifle, "our fortune's made!"—London Opinion.

Hewett—When I was in Kentucky I was arrested for violation of the liquor law.

Jewett—How was that?

Hewitt—I declined to take a drink.—Puck.